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# "Toward the First World War: the Diplomatic Lessons of Kaiser Wilhelm II"

**Boltaev Okhun**

Asia International University, Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology, Department of Foreign Languages and Social Sciences

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**Annotation:** This article analyzes the diplomatic dictations written by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1895, telegrams sent through ambassadors, and the correspondence related to Lord Salisbury and Sir E. Malet. The study examines, from a scholarly perspective, the political tensions between Germany and England within the context of the Armenian question, Mediterranean policy, and the Transvaal issue. By analyzing the processes of international diplomacy at the end of the 19th century, the article helps to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that led to the outbreak of the First World War.

**Keywords:** Kaiser Wilhelm II, German foreign policy, England, Lord Salisbury, Armenian question, Transvaal, Mediterranean policy, Berlin Treaty.

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**Late 19th-Century European Diplomacy and Geopolitical Rivalries** The late 19th century was a period of sharp geopolitical rivalry and contradictions in European diplomacy. After Bismarck's era, the German Empire was compelled to search for new directions in its foreign policy. Although Bismarck's policy of balance had maintained relative stability in the European alliance system, under Wilhelm II this balance gradually began to erode. The diplomatic correspondence of October 1895 revealed the deep mistrust between Germany and England. These documents provide important insights into the mechanisms of diplomacy at the time, the perspectives of state leaders, and the influence of the press on political processes.

- 1. The Armenian Question and European Politics.** At the end of the 19th century, the violence committed against the Armenian population within the Ottoman Empire became a key issue on the international political agenda. The British press extensively covered these events, sharply criticizing both Germany and Turkey. Kaiser Wilhelm II regarded such publications as hypocrisy, emphasizing that England was exploiting human rights for its own interests. This issue threatened to upset the balance of power in Europe and left a significant mark on German diplomacy.
- 2. The Transvaal Dispute and Tensions with England.** Competition between England and Germany intensified over control of the Transvaal Republic in South Africa. Sir E. Malet's derogatory assessment of German policy was perceived by the Kaiser as an ultimatum. Although Lord Salisbury denied these statements, the incident severely undermined trust between the two nations. The Transvaal issue became a source not only of regional but also global political conflict.
- 3. Mediterranean Policy and the Berlin Treaty.** British naval maneuvers in the Mediterranean were met with suspicion by Germany. Sharp statements in the press further heightened diplomatic tensions. Wilhelm II assessed Britain's policy as violating the Berlin Treaty and warned that unless Britain aligned its foreign policy with a clear and consistent course, Germany would be compelled to

seek closer ties with other powers—namely Russia and France. This approach later contributed to the formation of the European alliance system.

4. **Diplomatic Correspondence and Political Consequences.** The Kaiser's blunt opinions and his exchanges with ambassadors marked a new stage in Germany's pursuit of independent foreign policy. These events initiated a prolonged period of cooling relations between Germany and England. The British press's constant criticism of Germany deepened mistrust between the two states. Thus, the diplomatic correspondence influenced not only political decisions but also broader public sentiment.
5. **Historical Significance.** The diplomatic exchanges of 1895 represent a turning point in European history. These documents reveal how quickly diplomatic tensions at the end of the 19th century could escalate and eventually lead to global conflicts such as the First World War. The mistrust between Germany and England affected not only their bilateral relations but also the political balance of the entire continent.

**Diplomatic Relations and the Role of the Press.** By the end of the 19th century, the role of the press in diplomacy had grown significantly. The British and German press further intensified tensions between the two nations. British newspapers accused Germany of imperialistic ambitions, while the German press criticized Britain's duplicity. This dynamic had a major influence on the decision-making process in diplomacy by shaping public opinion. Sharp statements published in the press often had stronger political repercussions than the official relations between governments themselves.

**Changes in German Foreign Policy.** During Wilhelm II's reign, German foreign policy deviated from Bismarck's balanced approach, becoming more independent and aggressive. This shift altered the balance of power in Europe. Rising tensions with Britain forced Germany to seek alternative alliances with Russia and France. These political developments later served as the foundation for the geopolitical blocs that led to the First World War.

**Diplomatic Consequences.** Although Kaiser Wilhelm II's harsh speeches and correspondence were aimed at strengthening Germany's foreign policy, they worsened relations with Britain in the short term. Germany increasingly found itself isolated in international politics. Even allies like Italy, eager to maintain good relations with Britain, complicated Germany's diplomatic position.

**Conclusion.** The dictations and diplomatic correspondence of Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1895 vividly demonstrate the complexity of late 19th-century European diplomacy and the fragility of the balance of power. These documents reveal not only the political tension between Germany and Britain but also the deep mistrust and rivalry among European states. While the Armenian question and events in the Ottoman Empire influenced European geopolitical interests, the Transvaal crisis exposed sharp conflicts between Britain and Germany over African policy. Wilhelm II's characterization of British policy as "selfishness and bullying" and his critical attitude toward the British press marked a turning point in relations between the two nations.

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